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A significant pay increase in the Russian army

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On 25 January, Russian military received their first salaries under the new payment system. The changes cover about 350,000 professional officers and NCOs, as well as privates on contract service. All ranks have received substantial increases, of the order of two and a half times their current salaries. In the cases of personnel serving in harsh climates or in areas of conflict, as well as those serving in positions requiring specialist knowledge, the increase in wages was even higher – up to three times the current salary. A contract soldier currently receives approximately US$1000 a month, a junior officer (company commander) US$2000, and his counterpart serving on a nuclear submarine gets US$3000, the same as a senior officer (rank of colonel) commanding a missile regiment. The lowest salaries for senior officers commanding battalions will run to around US$2500 after the changes.

Commentary

- The announcement of a significant increase in salary has since 2009 been one of the elements intended to justify the wisdom of far-ranging reform of the Russian army, involving a drastic reduction in the number of officers (from 350,000 to 150,000 posts). It is worth emphasising that the promises made in this regard have been carried out in accordance with the schedule approved in previous years; the Russian military have known the sizes of their future salaries since at least last spring.

- It must be assumed that these raises will allow the Russian department of defence to achieve the main purpose for which they were undoubtedly introduced – keeping well-educated, forward-looking officers within the army, and attracting a high quality of privates and non-commissioned officers to contract service (425,000 contract soldiers are supposed to be serving in the Russian army by the end of 2015, yet currently there are fewer than 200,000). The scale of the raises, next to the systematic reduction of conscription, is also further confirmation that the Russian armed forces are becoming increasingly professional. In 2011, nearly 355,000 men were called up for military service – 41% of the number of the first recruits from 1993, of which about 280,000 ended up in the Russian army.

- Thanks to these raises, the Russian army has become one of the best-paying employers in Russia (next to the energy sector). This will be especially important in poorer regions, where soldiers can advance to the financial elite (the average salary in Russia is about US$600,and around $1500 in Moscow). It is likely that garrison towns will also see price

rises, which would arouse dissatisfaction in other groups of society. On one hand (with the ongoing professionalisation of the Russian army) this will estrange the military from the rest of society; on the other, the army will become even more closely linked to the ruling elite.

- With regard to the presidential elections in Russia planned for March, a raise for the armed forces could be understood as the government promoting itself as the 'champion' of the defence sphere as an essential part of Russian society. But this move does not seem to be a temporary buy-off of the army. The pacification of any post-election riots would be carried out by internal security formations (mainly from the Interior Ministry), whose pay increases have been much smaller in scale.